

What you should know

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 ■ Members of the public are welcome to visit the search room, where professional archival staff can assist with inquiries. For those people unable to visit the archives in person, staff can provide a research service for straightforward inquiries for a fee of \$55 per hour, including copying and postage.
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MURDER

at Mt Austin

at the archives
Wayne Doubleday



Today many people wouldn't know it was even there, with only its chimneys visible from the surrounding streets, but in 1935 the "Mt Austin" homestead was the scene of a murder which both shocked and fascinated the Wagga community and still does to this day.

On Monday, December 30, 1935, the body of Christopher James Bolger, aged 25, was found in a water tank underneath the floor of the veranda at "Mt Austin", a grazing and farming property located about three miles south of Wagga.

Chris's parents, James and Ellen, had purchased the farm in 1912, adding to the family properties of "Toronto" at Tootool and a house at Mosman.

Chris attended school in Sydney and returned to Wagga in 1929 to run the "Mt Austin" property.

Chris was a keen sportsman being a member of the Wagga Beach Lifesaving Club, the Wagga Australian Rules Club and Christian Brother's Old Boy's Rugby Club.

He also played baseball and was an amateur tightrope artist.

On Christmas Eve in 1935, Chris and some friends drove to Sydney leaving the property in the hands of Roy Malcolm Souter, then 16, who had been hired a couple of months earlier by Chris's father James.

During Chris's absence, Roy was seen driving around Wagga in Chris's yellow Chevrolet Roadster in the company of several young people including Daphne Nolan, who he had only recently met.

According to Daphne, Roy had told them he was Chris's brother Dick and that he and Chris each had a half share in the car.

Chris arrived back in Wagga on December 27 and was last seen alive that evening.

He was supposed to meet some friends at the Wagga Beach on Saturday afternoon but failed to arrive.

A coroner's inquest was held at a packed Wagga Court House on Wednesday, January 8, 1936, before deputy coroner Hugh Oates.

One of Chris's friends, Rowland Parker testified that he had observed the Chevrolet Roadster parked outside the New Moon Dance Palais on Saturday evening.

The next morning Parker saw Roy driving the car in Fitzmaurice Street; he found this odd as Chris was very protective of his car and never let anyone else drive it.

On flagging the car down and asking Roy about Chris's whereabouts, Roy told him that Chris had gone to Henry to buy some sheep and would be back on Monday or Tuesday.

On Monday morning, Parker, who by now was very concerned about the continued absence of his friend, proceeded to the property on his bicycle.

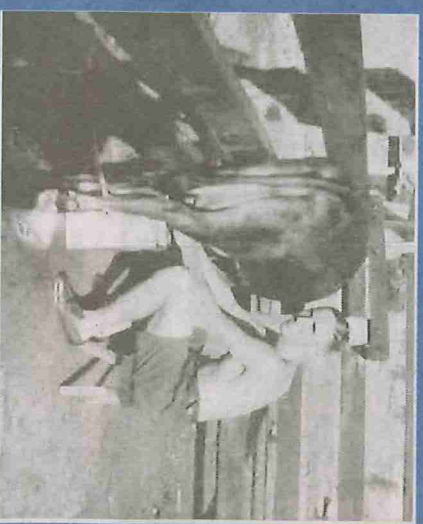
On arrival, he discovered blood stains on the floor of the sleepout on the southern side of the homestead, where Chris slept in summer.

Further investigation revealed more blood stains on the floorboards of the breezeaway veranda located between the house and the kitchen.

Constable Dowell testified that he received a phone call from Parker at about 9.15am on the



Above: Christopher helps out on the family property.



Left: Portrait of Christopher James Bolger.

Left: A newspaper clipping of the Wagga Beach Lifesaving Club of 1934-35 - the winners of the Eastern Riverina Swimming Association Premiership - with Christopher Bolger pictured middle row on the far right.

New Metro manager
 The manager of the Metro, Mr. J. G. ...
 Mr. J. G. ...
 Mr. J. G. ...

HEADACHE BRACHACHE COLDS & FLU
 The best in relief for
 all pains of pain or infection
 ...
 ...

Old timers return to the beach
 A group of old timers ...
 ...
 ...

Monday, voicing his concerns. Accompanied by constables Ramnus and Walsh, he then proceeded to Fitzmaurice Street, where he saw Souter driving Bolger's car.

They questioned Souter and took him with them to "Mt Austin", where they quickly discovered that some of the boards on the veranda were loose.

Removal of the loose floorboards exposed a water tank measuring about 25 feet long by 15ft wide and 10ft deep.

An improvised grappling hook was used to search the tank and led to the discovery of Bolger's body, clad in pyjamas with a chaff bag tied around his head and upper torso.

A heavy piece of farm equipment had been attached to his feet by rope and he had suffered two bullet wounds to the head.

When initially questioned, Roy claimed the blood was from a buck hare which he had shot earlier using the .22 pea rifle discovered in the house, but confessed to the murder when his claims were refuted by the police.

At the time of his arrest, Roy was wearing a Manly Life Saving Club blazer which belonged to Chris; in his pockets were found a medallion belonging to Chris and three .22 calibre rifle

cartridges. Roy stated that on Chris's return from Sydney he had mentioned his friendship with Daphne Nolan and that Roy had insulted her honour.

They had argued but both went to bed. Upon waking on Monday morning, Roy asked Chris whether he would still say the same about Daphne.

Chris replied: "Yes, and if you are going to have her here then you better get out of my place."

Roy was enraged and looked around for something to hit Chris with, eventually coming across the loaded rifle.

He shot him twice in the head at close range, tying the chaff bag over his head because of the way he spoke of Daphne.

The trial was held at the Central Criminal Court in Sydney on March 9, 1936.

Though Roy pleaded guilty and was sentenced to death, due to his young age (he turned 17 on December 9), the sentence was commuted to life imprisonment.

He was incarcerated in Goulburn gaol and was released in 1952.

Compiled by Paul O'Donnell